

Message Text

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PAGE 01 GABORO 00576 011753Z

ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00

NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-12 /090 W

-----076999 011759Z /46

O R 011424Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1692

INFO AMCONSUL CAPETOWN

AMEMBASSY DARESSALAAM

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LILONGWE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY MASDRU

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 0576

CAPE TWON FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS PGOV PINS BC RH

SUBJECT: AMBUSH OF BDF PATROL

REF: A) GABORONE 0195 B) GABORONE 0566

SUMMARY: DURING MARCH 1 CONVERSATION, PRESIDENTIAL
ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY CHARLES TIBONE GAVE US FURTHER
DETIALS CONCERNING RHODESIAN SECURITY FORCE ATTACK ON BDF PATROL.
ACCORDING TO TIBONE, GOB STILL FINDS RHODESIAN ATTAC "INEXPLICABLE",
ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF "FREEDOM FIGHTERS" IN AREA HAD BEEN
DISARMED AND APPREHENDED BY BDF IN RECENT WEEKS. FURNERAL
SERVICE FOR BDF DEAD WILL PROBABLY TAKE PLACE MARCH 2 IN
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GABORONE. GOB REVIEW OF RHODESIAN POLICY OPTIONS WILL
CONTINUE, ACCORDING TO TIBONE. END SUMMARY.

1. TIBONE TOLD US THAT THREE BDF LANDROVERS WERE
MOVING IN COLUMN WHEN STRICK BY AUTOMATIC WEAPONS AND
ROCKET FIRE WHICH ALMOST IMMEDIATELY DISABLED LEAD AND
TRAIL VEHICLES. LANDROVER CARRYING AMMUNITION WAS HIT

BY ROCKET FIRE WHICH CAUSED SECONDARY EXPLOSION.
SEVEN BDF SOLDIERS WERE BURNED BEYOND RECOGNITION
BY EXPLODING AMMUNITION WHILE REMAINING EIGHT BDF
DEAD WERE KILLED BY BULLET WOUNDS. MISSING BDF
SOLDIERS HAVE BEEN FOUND UNHARMED.

2.ACCORDING TO TIBONE, ATTACK HAS SHATTERED GOB
HOPES FOR INDEFINITE CONTINUATION OF RELATIVELY
QUIETE SITUATION ALONG BOTSWANA/RHODESIA BORDER IN RECENT
MONTHS (SEE GABORONE 0195), HE POINTED OUT THAT RSF
HAS ACKNOWLEDGED RESPONSIBILITY FOR ATTACK (SEPTTEL)
AND HE REPEATED VP MASIRE'S DENIAL THAT BDF PATROL
WAS ASSISTING OR HAD EVEN SIGHTED "FREEDOM FIGHTERS" IN
IMMEDIATE AREA OF CLASH. HE ACKNOWLEDGED, HOWEVER,
THAT "FREEDOM FIGHTERS" HAD BEEN ACTIVE ALONG THAT
STRETCH OF BORDER BUT MAINTAINED THAT BDF HAD CARRIED
OUT ITS STRICT STANDING ORDERS TO APPREHEND AND DISARM
ANY WHO CROSS INTO BOTSWANA.

3. WITH REGARD TO IMPACT OF INCIDENT ON GOB'S
RHODESIA POLICY, TIBONE STATED THAT CLOSING OF LAND
BORDER POST AT KAZANGULA (WHICH WILL NOT AFFECT
OPERATIONS OF BOTSWANA/ZAMBIA FERRY) IS ONLY MEASURE
YET DECIDED UPON. ACCORDING TO TIBONE, GOB REVIEW OF
POLICY OPTIONS WILL CONTINUE.

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4. COMMENT: THOROUGH PLANNING AND EFFECTIVE
EXECTION OF ATTACK SUGGEST PREMEDITATED AMBUSH RATHER
THAN RANDOM CLASH BETWEEN BDF AND RHODESIAN PATROL IN
HOT PURSUIT OF "TERRORISTS". ATTACK MAY HAVE BEEN
DESIGNED TO INTIMIDATE BDF FROM CLOSE PATROL OF
BORDER AREAS THEREBY INCREASING SCOPE FOR RSF SUP-
PRESSION OF GUERRILLAS ON BOTH SIDES OF BORDER.

5. GOB POLICY OPTIONS VIS-A-VIS RHODESIA ARE, OF
COURSE, SEVERELY LIMITED BY BOTSWANA'S MILITARY
WEAKNESS AND ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE ON RHODESIA RAILWAYS.
HOWEVER, AS NOTED REF B, RSF ATTACK COULD WELL CAUSE
GOB TO DROP ITS WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE TOWARD
SALISBURY TALKS IN FAVOR OF OUTRIGHT CONDEMNATION OF
INTERNAL SETTLEMENT. END COMMENT.

6. ACTION REQUESTED: IF FURTHER EVIDENCE IS NEEDED OF THE SPECIAL
STRAINS ON BOTSWANA BECAUSE OF ITS FRONTLINE POSITION,
THIS LATEST INCIDENT SHOULD SUFFICE AND MAKE
BOTSWANA'S REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE ALL THE MORE
UNDERSTANDABLE. ACCORDINGLY, WE URGE THAT DEPARTMENT
EXPEDITE THE HANDLING OF DIRECT SSA PROGRAM GRANTS

TO BOTSWANA.

7. ACTION REQUESTED: WE BELIEVE OFFICIAL CONDOLENCE
(REQUESTED REF B) SHOULD BE SENT PRIOR TO FUNERAL
IF POSSIBLE. PLEASE ADVISE WHETHER WE MAY EXPECT
CONDOLENCE MESSAGE FROM DEPARTMENT OF WHITE HOUSE.
ALBERTI

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